Regional Administrator Visits Houston, Texas
March 11, 2015

Issue: <u>Libby Asbestos Contaminated Vermiculite Exfoliation Sites</u>

Background/Status: The W.R. Grace owned and operated the Zonolite Mine, located in Libby, Montana. Vermiculite ore was mined for commercial purposes from the 1920's through 1990. Vermiculite, a naturally occurring fibrous mineral, has been used in lawn, garden, agricultural, and horticultural products; thermal and sound insulation; and construction, insulation, and lightweight packing material. Vermiculite from the Libby mine was contaminated with tremolite-actinolite, generally referred to as Libby amphibole asbestos (LAA). Exposure to asbestos is strongly associated with malignant and nonmalignant respiratory diseases, including asbestosis and mesothelioma. Contaminated Libby vermiculite was shipped to exfoliation facilities in numerous locations throughout the United States, and reportedly to three facilities in Houston, TX. EPA is nearing completion of assessment activities at the Vermiculite Products Site, the Isolatek Industries Site and the Tri-Lite Almeda Site. EPA's assessment included offsite assessment at neighboring residential and commercial properties.

Message:

- EPA's Removal Program has conducted site assessment activities at all three sites. These assessments included both soil sampling and activity-based air sampling (ABS). During ABS samplers mimic soil-disturbing activity, such as gardening or childs play for residential properties, that may actually be conducted at a location, air samples are collected to determine the potential exposure from aerosolized asbestos fibers.
- EPA conducted emergency removal actions at the Vermiculite Products Site to address LAA contamination at a property slated for imminent residential redevelopment. The contamination was identified when EPA took soil and activity-based samples at the site. Additional removal activities are planned to address LAA contamination identified in settled dust inside an on-site structure, as well as LAA contamination identified at on-site and at offsite commercial/industrial and undeveloped property.
- EPA's investigation of potential LAA contamination on properties near the Isolatek Site did not identify LAA in amounts that would present a health risk to the community surrounding the site.
- EPA's investigation of potential LAA contamination at the Tri-Lite Almeda Site did not detect LAA.

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